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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: UNHCR COUNTRY REP GIVES OVERVIEW

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: POLOFF met with Eusebe Hounokou, UNHCR Country Representative to Nigeria, on January 7 and discussed concerns about potential violent uprising of Nigerians living on the Bakassi Peninsula, the possible repatriation of Nigerian refugees from Cameroon to their homes in Taraba State, Nigeria, and UNHCR funding of child trafficking programs in Nigeria. END SUMMARY.

BAKASSI

¶2. (SBU) Hounokou visited the Bakassi region in December 2002, shortly after the ICJ ruling in favor of the Government of Cameroon (GRC). While there, he met members of the Bakassi Liberation Front (BLF) who told him they are willing to fight to protect their perceived rights. Since then, Hounokou and UNHCR offices in Nigeria and Cameroon have been monitoring developments in the Bakassi Peninsula and the Anglophone region of Cameroon. In previous discussions with POLOFF, Hounokou expressed concern for Nigerian nationals living in Bakassi and for Anglophone Cameroonian in general. Hounokou thinks that Bakassis may be arming themselves like the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta. Although he is unable to substantiate his concerns, he believes it would be easy for Bakassi fishermen to smuggle arms into the region in their fishing boats.

¶3. (SBU) UNHCR offices in Yaounde reported to UNHCR Lagos in October 2003 that a splinter group from Southern Cameroon's National Council (SCNC) had declared its independence and claimed that its youths were armed. Should Nigeria cede the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon, Hounokou believes the Bakassis may begin an armed struggle against the GRC, which would create a refugee crisis. He identified the SCNC as a "natural ally" of the Bakassis and feels that a conflict in the Bakassi Peninsula may inflame tensions in Anglophone Cameroon.

REPATRIATION OF REFUGEES TO TARABA STATE

¶4. (SBU) UNHCR Nigeria estimates that approximately 17,000 Nigerian refugees live in neighboring Cameroon. Mostly ethnic Fulani herders, they fled Benue and Taraba States following ethno-religious clashes between the Tiv and Jukun peoples in January 2002. Hounokou will coordinate a field assessment in Taraba State in early February to determine if conditions will enable the refugees to return to their home villages. He has asked representatives from the US, UK, German, and Canadian Missions to accompany him along with representatives from ICRC, FAO, and UNICEF. (UNHCR will likely look for international support and possible donor partners to help organize repatriation.)

HUMAN SECURITY PROGRAM FUNDING

¶5. (U) Hounokou is expecting a US \$2 million budget to fund a country program on Human Security. ECOWAS and the UNHCR will jointly seek funding for the project. UNHCR Nigeria has submitted a project proposal to its headquarters and has tied in child trafficking. Hounokou believes child trafficking is a post conflict problem within the region; he wants to identify programs that target source and destination communities to alleviate this growing trend. He expressed interest in USG efforts in combating trafficking in Nigeria, regionally and domestically, and may solicit assistance from the Mission to identify programs.

¶6. (U) The UN High Commissioner for Refugees is scheduled to visit Nigeria in April.
HINSON-JONES